

TESTIMONY RE: HB5347
AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF LATEX GLOVES IN FOOD BUSINESSES
General Law Committee.

Chairmen: Senator Carlo Leone and Representative David Baram.
Ranking Members: Senator Kevin Witkos and Representative Dan Carter.

Connecticut House of Representatives

My name is Victor Gennaro, DO. I am a board certified orthopedic surgeon and I have not used latex gloves since 2001. My wife has been severely allergic since 1993 and our son developed the allergy as a young boy. I am writing to support Hawaii State Senate Bill No. 911 A Bill for An Act Regarding Latex, banning latex from medical, dental and food establishments.

When my wife was first diagnosed with the latex allergy we did not know how serious this allergy was nor did we know the properties of the latex protein were such that they transferred from the glove to any surface it touched and it stays on that surface for 24 hours regardless of washing. Not much was known about latex allergy in 1993.

In 1990, 3 years prior to her diagnosis we noticed she would break out in hives every evening after she worked as an Emergency Room physician. She also routinely had rashes on her hands after glove use. About 18 months later she began to develop symptoms of food poisoning whenever we went to certain restaurants.

These symptoms would start within the hour of ingesting the food – not a typical food poisoning presentation. We did not understand this as I would have tasted her food most evenings and I would have no symptoms. These symptoms progressed over 6 months from mild cramping to severe abdominal cramping and flushing that would begin within 20-30 minutes of eating and then severe, crippling diarrhea that would start within the hour. These anaphylactic symptoms would last from one to three days. We still had no idea what was causing it.

Early in 1993 she called me from her work as a family doctor/ ER doctor and told me there was something wrong. Her hands, wrists and arms up to her shoulders were swelling and she was hot and flushed and felt very sick and weak and lightheaded. I told her to come to my office. At that point she had taken the gloves off for about 20 minutes but still had mild wheezing and hives with residual swelling in her hands and wrists. But she was improving. I had her call an allergist immediately. She went back to work and all the symptoms returned. Fortunately, the allergist called back and told her to remove the gloves immediately. She did so but was not told she could not be around latex. Her symptoms worsened throughout the day but she returned to normal by the next morning. She never wore latex gloves again.

In 1994 we finally figured out that the latex gloves were contaminating the food she was eating and that was why she was having anaphylactic symptoms after eating in certain restaurants. This was proved scientifically in 2000. When a study was done that proved the latex protein transferred 100% of the time to food and as well as any other surface it touched.

Her symptoms seemed to be getting worse. She had daily issues; headaches, never feeling well, severe fatigue and asthma. I thought she was depressed and just needed to get a grip. Then one day I came home from performing surgery all day. I had washed my hands several times since wearing the gloves and I had changed my clothes. I went to give her a hug and a hello kiss and she began to develop allergy symptoms immediately - itchy runny eyes, shortness of breath racing heart and some shortness of breath. We finally put it together. She was allergic to me! I have not used latex gloves since. This was around 2000.

Latex is so dangerous that Johns Hopkins Hospital banned it from their facility in 2008. As physicians we ask specifically "Do you have an allergy to latex?" Here in NH we have removed it from our major medical centers - Catholic Medical Center and Dartmouth Hitchcock as well as our local hospitals here in northern NH.

I use vinyl gloves in the offices and synthetic poly-isoprene gloves in the operating room. I am able to perform microsurgery without any problem using these non-latex gloves. I only use the synthetic poly-isoprene glove - which has no latex protein in it- for surgery. Otherwise I use the much less expensive vinyl glove in my office without any problems. My wife is no longer allergic to me!

This allergy has caused significant lifestyle changes. My wife and son cannot go out to dinner unless the restaurant does not use latex gloves. They cannot go into any showroom or store that has latex balloons, as the protein is airborne and will trigger asthma symptoms. They cannot go into any hospital, medical or dental office that uses latex or even has latex products in the room. It will trigger asthma symptoms.

The CDC states the only way to prevent a latex allergy is to avoid latex. The only way to treat it is to avoid latex. Every time any person comes in contact with latex through food (eat it) through airborne (breath it), through glove use in the mouth or in surgery or on the skin- (mucous membranes absorb it directly into the blood stream). How can we prevent this allergy if we are feeding it and exposing it to our entire population every day?

How can people avoid latex if it is in medical, dental offices, emergency medical systems and restaurants? They cannot be resuscitated or treated by anyone wearing latex gloves; they cannot be transported to the hospital by an ambulance that has latex gloves or products on board. They cannot be given medication that has to go through a latex stopper or port in an IV. The very system in place designed

to help them or save their lives could kill them. Please remove latex from EMS, medical and dental facilities.

There is no reason to use latex in any situation anymore. The glove companies know the product is dangerous and they all make credible, less expensive, excellent gloves that work at least as well. Changing to non-latex gloves will reduce the workers compensation claims, reduce lost wages, reduce disability and reduce medical costs for treatment of the daily symptoms as well as the more expensive emergency treatments.

I am not asking you to spend more money to put this ban into effect but rather spend less money. In December 2012 a court ruled that latex allergy was covered under the American with Disabilities Act. We are not asking you to make expensive renovations to accommodate my family and the more than 3,000,000 people who suffer from this allergy. We are asking that you use less expensive, appropriate, credible alternatives to not only keep people with the allergy safe but to prevent further growth of this allergy. We have been latex-safe in NH since the mid 2000's. Many of our restaurants have stopped using latex. With so many credible, inexpensive alternatives I believe there is no excuse to risk harm to even one patient or patron. Please look favorably on HB 5347.

Sincerely,

Victor Gennaro, DO
Plymouth Orthopedics and Sports Medicine
16 Hospital Road
Plymouth, NH 03264
603-536-1565